

Everything All At Once

Carl Cherry Center for the Arts
Poetry Anthology

The Elliot Ruchowitz-Roberts
Monterey County High School
Poetry Awards 2024

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The Cherry Center acknowledges our Poet-in-Schools, contest judge, and anthology editor, Patrice Vecchione, for promoting the art and craft of poetry to students across Monterey County.

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2024 Award Winners

First Place

“letter to younger me”

Tessa Stallcup, Carmel High School

Second Place

“Dualities of Girlhood”

Kate Blakely, Carmel High School

Third Place

“Monster”

Gabriel Cerna-Garibay, Rancho San Juan High School

Fourth Place

“Exacting”

Brianna Avila, Rancho San Juan High School

Fifth Place

“My Heritage”

Lauren Galicia, Carmel High School

Introduction

Sometimes life is so truly everything all at once that writing a poem is pretty much the only way—or at least one of the very few—to grab and hold some of it up to the light to see it for what it is, to see it through one’s own eyes, and not those of any other. Writing a poem is a way to reflect, consider, and respond by creating something not only true, but beautiful. *Everything All at Once* is a declaration and a celebration, a way through, and a rise above confusion and difficulty.

My deepest thanks to Robert Reese and Cathy Kobre whose dedication and efforts make this program possible. They’re the most lovely people to work with. Thank you to the Carl Cherry Board of Directors for their unstinting support of the poetry program. And to the high school teachers who welcomed me into their classrooms, you too make this program possible. I’m particularly grateful to Molly Bauer of Rancho San Juan High who most certainly has a poet’s soul.

Last fall, when it became clear that the program’s anticipated funding wasn’t forthcoming, I put out a call to friends, family members, and my community at large—people I know and love. Some of them shared my request with their communities. In 48 hours, we raised \$4,000, half of what we needed for the program to proceed as planned. By the end of two weeks, the remaining funding had been donated! (Donors’ names appear on the following page.)

Thank you to all who so generously contributed in recognition of the value for young people in reading and writing poetry.

As you read *Everything All at Once*, you may wonder why the majority of poems come from Carmel High students. Submitting to this competition is a requirement for all their sophomore students, and so the majority of work frequently comes from Carmel High. We’d love to see other schools join them and make writing, editing, and submitting poems to the poetry contest a part of their curriculum.

Poetically Yours,

Patrice Vecchione

Carl Cherry Center for the Arts Poet-in-Schools

Friends of Patrice Vecchione

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Jean Wolff
Julie Wooten

letter to younger me

please forgive me.
i think i failed you;
or maybe just lost you
somewhere along the way.
your constant, insatiable wonder
and love of being outside;
you, always with a book in hand,
fantasy worlds as an escapism.
you're gone now, and i often wonder
where did i go wrong?

it's nothing you did;
no, you did what you had to: you grew up.
now i'm only trying to find all the pieces of you
that are left in me.
finding those lost fragments—
lighthearted joy and hope,
childish gaiety and carelessness—
these things i try to hold onto,
though they slip through my fingers
like water, liquid gold.

so grab onto these things tight;
hold them close to your heart and don't let go.
tuck them next to your love of warm sun
and cool forests and hot beaches;
next to the never-ending compassion
and deep-rooted empathy,
always present even when it hurts.
these are things that will never leave you,
still present after years of change.
do it for me, because sometimes
i think you're stronger than i am.
leave them for me in this dark corner
so i may dig them up, dust the cobwebs off,
and i just ask of you—please forgive me.
i may not be where you wanted
but i promise i am trying.

Tessa Stallcup
Carmel High School
First Place

My Future

So, "What do you want to do after high school?"
My heart sinks to the pit of my stomach
As silence fills the room.
I stare down at my plate
Almost piercing the white ceramic
Hoping that if I look hard enough
The answer will appear
In my bowl of Spaghetios

The Future drags behind me
like a ball and chain
The buzz of pestering questions
"Where will you go to college?"
"What do you want to be?"
"Who are you?"

The weight on my shoulders
Crushes me like a rock
Shame is apparent on my tongue
"I don't really know"
I respond while pleading thoughts
Race through my head

Sorrowful glances flow across the table
My chair feels like quicksand
As incoherent words come from my parent's mouth
I mumble in a quick reply
And run to my room

As I stare at the gray walls,
I remember the bright pink
That used to cover them
And where the doll house
And calico critters used to lay

All I want is to go back
And sit on my bedroom floor
I play with my dolls when I hide
From cleaning the bathroom
Is there any way I go back to running around
on the green grass hills
Playing dozens of versions of tag
Like there is no tomorrow

Is there any way I can stay where I am right now
Not having to grow up
And figure out the course of my life
That seems to be just outside of my grasp

Can I stay in the moment?
Where I only have to worry about today
And not what lies ahead?

Ava Cassidy
Carmel High School

Pandemic Woes

A scene from a play, spending my day stuck inside.
Spending two years or more stuck in half a square mile.
I have not seen my friends in a very long time,
Except on the screen, where they're all strung in a line.
A little green box shows up when they speak,
Just two classes a day, five days of the week.
One hundred minutes is quite the duration
To sit up on screen. This isn't vacation.
A huge chunk of life has been taken away,
Living life in true boredom, day after day,
Sitting through classes, phasing out, not listening.
Doctors going on about six-foot social distancing.
My head is spinning rapidly.
It's been going weeks and weeks:
The lockdown, the cops out, people taking to the streets.
The masks on, the will gone. Old times are obsolete.
You might look in the mirror and, not recognize who you see.

Luciano Berlin Smith Rowland
Carmel High School

Wide Turn

Homes become
Our sheltered space.

We sought solace
In our own embrace.

Masks adorned
Each face we met,
A sign of times
We won't forget.
Hand washed,
Distance kept wide
In hopes that soon
We'd turn the tide.

Zoom calls replaced
Our warmest hugs.
Screens the only place
For shoulder shrugs.
We found new ways
To show our love.

Jasmin Gonzalez
Silver Star, a program of Rancho Cielo

Dualities of Girlhood

Being a girl is everything all at once.
Being a girl is beautiful,
is being independent and strong, is being smart.
Being a girl is braiding your friend's hair
before you go out,
is complimenting a stranger's nails
and then ending up lifelong friends.
It is showing your friends new music,
it is late-night drives.
Being a girl is a community,
is supporting each other.
But being a girl is not all pretty.
Because
being a girl is slowly watching your rights slip away,
is constantly having to defend yourself.
It is tirelessly explaining what we go through.
It is being scared, imagining what might happen.
Being a girl is scrolling through social media endlessly,
thinking about the things we aren't.
It is trying to show the "perfect amount of emotion,"
and it is always looking over your shoulder
wherever you go.
Being a girl is trying your hardest,
but not being enough.
Being a girl is looking in the mirror,
while tears slowly roll down your cheek.
It is getting asked "What were you wearing?"
It is trying to speak out, but being silenced.
Being a girl is telling your friends
they are beautiful no matter what,
but silently comparing yourself to everyone else.
It is watching your place in the world fade,
while having to deal with narcissistic men in power.
Being a girl is having to prove yourself in every situation,
having to always put in more effort.
Being a girl is anything you want it to be,
but being a girl is impossible.

Kate Blakely
Carmel High School
Second Place

That Girl

After "Her Kind" by Anne Sexton

I have gone out, an exhausted teenage girl,
haunting the beauty aisle, braver out of sight;
dreaming of perfection, oh, how I've tried
to meet the standards, flaw by flaw:
helpless thing, face on, out of mind.
A girl like that is not a pretty girl, quite.
I have been her kind.

I have found the daunting mirror on the wall,
shelves filled with concealer, mascara, teeth whitener,
self-tanner, tweezers, innumerable goods;
fixed this and that, looked too long:
emotional, crying, rearranging the misaligned.
A girl like that is not a lovely girl.
I have been her kind.

I have played your games,
waved my pristine polished nails as people pass by,
learning how to fake it, disheveled.
Your words still echo in my conscience,
but it won't be enough.
A girl like that is ashamed to be.
I have been her kind.

Cassidy Scheid
Carmel High School

Wrestler's Kind

After "Her Kind" by Anne Sexton

I have gone out, a Carmel wrestler, one of a dozen,
haunting the mat, braver at every match.
Dreaming of pins, I have pushed my limits
over the sweat and blood, driven by determination:
A resilient thing, battling rivals, out of mind.
A pursuit like that is not easy, quite.
I have been a wrestler's kind.
I have found the hidden weakness
within the face of adversity,
filled them with discipline, endurance, grit,
passion, team spirit, innumerable sacrifices;
fixed my gaze upon a ranking.
Strategizing, rearranging the dynamics of a takedown.
A challenge like that is fought with heart and soul.
I have been a wrestler's kind.
I have persevered in the halls of challenge, steadfast,
sharpening my skills at every opportunity,
learning the techniques of champions,
surviving the toughest bouts,
where my will still rises against the odds
and my spirit remains unbroken when my resolve is tested.
A journey like that is not easy to undertake.
I have been a wrestler's kind.

Caden Rosati-Carthy
Carmel High School

Life on the Street

Boxing always helps with anger
If you grew up fighting for everything you had
you always remember things like hustling twice as hard
for money and little jobs here and there
and if you never ask for help
they will never know
and even though you're used to doing things alone
you always need a hand here and there
You're more grown than others
if you had to be mature at a young age
and though I'm still young
i understand the world
You'll never understand my story
unless you grew up on a certain street

Alejandro Carreto
Rancho San Juan High School

Monster

I am many things.
I am not a
“Monster.”

Petty crimes,
and drug abuse;
But I am not
a “Monster.”

Family problems
and a bad temper;
But I am not
a “Monster.”

“Monster this”
and “Monster that.”
Am I really
some sort
of “Monster?”

Mirror

My 4 sharp silver corners
Connect the smooth glass in between
As I lean up against the wall and gleam.

Figures come and go.
Some turn to look at me
And some keep moving throughout their busy day.
But as I mimic, it is here that I will stay.

All I can do is counter and copy.
I echo your tears.
I clone your smile.
I follow your movements,
Left right up or down,
Laugh cry smile or frown.
I am you and you are me,
Because we are intertwined you see.

It is my duty to be your reflection,
So when you say that you hate what you see,
How dare you say that you hate me.
I work day and night,
Come rain or shine
To impersonate you with all my might.

I am but a parallel picture.
Yet when you look at me too long
I can see your smile flicker.
And when you start to frown,
I feel that I have let you down.

Because I am you and you are me.
We are intertwined you see,
So when you can't stand to look at me in my frame,
How dare you put such shame on my name

It is my duty to be your reflection.
I lean and I gleam even while you dream,
I see your accomplishments and your misfortunes too.
But still, I admire you.

I reflect and I mimic and I shine
As you and I become more and more intertwined.
Yet after all, I am just a mirror.
So it is here that I will sit

My 4 corners connecting
The smooth silver glass in between
As I lean up against the wall and gleam.

Norah Strawser
Carmel High School

Impressions

I listen to my instincts—my first impressions
because I have found that,
much better than a voice,
a pair of hands tell me your story.

My grandmother's hands had
three mountain ranges sprawled across each palm,
three fertile war-torn valleys
in between thick skin
providing a home when her village was bulldozed,
deeply ridged knuckles and a crinkled forehead,

also my father's gene.
She had 4 scars of 4 children lost,
7 freckles of 7 children who lived,
and a birthmark in the shape of the courtyard
where she took off her headscarf
and made tea for the mothers in the neighborhood.

These are the hands that told me her story
after she was gone.

But this world is filled with soft hands,
going nowhere, changing nothing.

My hands are young,
I'm not expected to have lived yet.
But I hope I am,
going somewhere, changing something.

I hope my hands will look like my grandmother's.
These are the hands that will tell our story,
hers and mine.
So that someone will look at me
and listen to their instincts, their first impressions
telling them I have lived.

Zana Balaban
Carmel High School

My Heritage

100% Filipino. Am I, truly?

I imagine my grandparents' lives
in provinces of rice and sand,
of carabao that
wade in the water and

carried baskets of fish across miles of dunes,
and snakes that
slithered in the wake of stars
with groups of men with lamps
burning paths for the hunt.

I imagine the sparkling waters of Boracay,
or the heat that dampens cloth
and leaves you hot and sticky,
or the open markets with meat
drying in the baking sun,
preserved by the ocean's crystal tears.

I imagine it all, as if
I am left cradling wispy remnants.
But these experiences,
these memories are
vivid, tangible,
lived through my grandparents.

Grandma Lucy and Grandpa Sid came from Pangasinan.
Grandma Beth and Grandpa Paul came from Ilocos Norte.

As teacher, soldier, dietitian, engineer,
they flew to the land of opportunity, the land unknown.
My parents' existence and my own rode on those wings.

I'm third-generation,
if I hear Tagalog or Ilocano— I cannot tell.
But when my grandpa calls me 'anak'
I cannot help but feel a flower of familiarity bloom.

I've watched the rhythmic dance of tinkling,
breathed the scent of San Jose Asian markets
where fish lay on ice while, comically,
their sentient counterparts watched from tanks above.
I've picked the sour calamansi off the tree of life
and stirred sticky rice and coconut cream in a pot
with my dad to make biko.
I've craved lumpia, pancit, and adobo,
devoured sesame balls at Tomi,
and bok choy soup touched by my grandparents' love.

So even though my tongue does not curl to
the tongue of my ancestors,
and my feet have not yet felt
the sands of the Philippines,

100% Filipino. I am, truly.

Ma

I love the way you know what I need.
When you ask me if I want my seat warmer on
and I say no, but you turn it on anyway,
the way you always make sure I have a jacket, lunch,
and someone to talk to.
I love the way you juice anything green in our fridge,
the way you come up behind me
and scream momma's out of order,
meaning you're going to bed.
I love the way you call me Bambalona
after our favorite book from the Los Gatos Library,
the way you cringe and cower
when you see even a slight wound on me.
I love the way you talk about our memories
like two best friends growing up together.
I love the way you care even for the people
in my life who have hurt me, the way you say,
peace be with the people who lost such a jewel like you.
I love the way you are happy,
when your eyes and lips smile the same way,
and you grab my hands to start dancing with me,
the way you mimic mean girls, snobby women,
sassy men, and your daughter with an attitude.
I love you for the way
you've disregarded your whole life
so I could have one.

Celine Karavelioglu
Carmel High School

Blackberry Thistles

A picket fence,
some common sense,
“Do not touch the thistles or the thorns,”
her tia’s woven baskets,
her mother’s orange gloves.
She was chosen to pick the blackberries,
so pick the blackberries she does.

Dozens immature, unripe in a row,
the reddish violet color
was unfit for a blackberry,
so she left the berries their space,
and enough time to grow.

After one to two, to what felt like a dozen hours,
she finally felt accomplished with her collection.
Tripping over thistles and flowers,
she met with her tia and her mother,
to show her affection
through blackberries!

Stella Nunez
Carmel High School

we were supposed to get matching tattoos on my 18th.
i think when i get there, i'll still get mine in honor of you
or maybe i'll just stick n poke it myself.

i still get the itch to call you
and see how you're doing.
there's a lot of girl talk you missed
but i'm not the religious type,
so now i check up on your mom.

my knee ached at your service
and the pain reminded me of sitting back
on my knees for what felt like hours
holding your right hand after you dislocated your shoulder.

your mom was going to take you to Paris on your 21st.
you only wanted to pop a bottle of authentic champagne.

in two years, you'll be ink on my skin.
in five, you'll be at the catacombs.

Alma Gemela

Cuando estoy dormida, la mente no se me apaga.
Solo puedo escuchar tu voz; mirar tu cara; oler tu aroma.
Un pensamiento que nunca se va, eres de lo que sueño.

Ensenarte lo que tengo escondido, afuera de la vista.
Donde los ojos no miran, donde viven las creaturas de la noche.
Compartir todo contigo, los errores y fallas, aprender contigo.

Sin mapa, sin ubicación,
Algo que te encuentra cuando lo necesitas más,
El pedazo final de la rompecabeza que se llama vida.
Mi alma gemela.

translation:

Gem Soul

When I am asleep, my mind does not turn off
I can only hear your voice; see your face; smell your aroma.
A thought that never leaves. You are what I dream of.

Showing you what I have hidden away from sight,
where the eyes don't see, where the creatures of the night live.
Sharing everything with you, errors and failures, learning with you.

Without map, without location,
Something that you find when you need it most
The final piece of the puzzle that is called life.
My twin flame.

Bee De Leon
Rancho San Juan High School

Illusion

Who lives in love is left illusioned.
Who lives in illusion dies in reality,
and he who lives in reality
longs to have an illusion.

Liliana Barrera
Rancho San Juan High School

On Thin Ice

My father's rage through the second floor
can be felt as if it were a blazing fire.
The screaming and yelling from my sister and him
makes me dwindle.

I hear the cries by the bathroom door as I walk upstairs.
My sister in tears for there is nowhere to go.
Holding onto each other and longing for our mother's soft touch.
Trying to find any way to take us back to just two hours ago.

Talking to the man is harder than walking through a minefield.
We take each step carefully trying not to hit a bomb.
Seeing her like this made me do nothing but cry.

I never know what his true intentions are on the inside.
Trying only to support my sister,
whispering to her "Just five more days."

As we cry and cling to one another in the bathroom,
counting the seconds till they turned to hours,
planning to avoid him as much as possible,
for his rage was able to burn down the house.

The fury through the second floor melts the thin ice we stood on,
breaking our hearts, breaking our trust,
breaking anything that we had.

As years go by nothing seems to change
between my sister and him.
The time they spend together dwindles.
The cops called time after time,
disallowed for a continuation of their relationship,
leaving me now all alone
with the man that we called a fire.

A fire that melts my life. A fire that melts me.
The fire that melts the thin ice we once stood on.

Julien Cho
Carmel High School

The Monster

It follows me around
like a shadow
relentless

It chases me
through streets
far from home

It leers over my shoulder
every time I speak
opens its sharp teeth

It knocks on the window
late at night
a darkness in the moonlight

It whispers words
lips against my ear
poisoning my mind

It swarms my thoughts
like a plague of locusts
devouring happy thoughts

And it is everywhere
and it can appear from
nowhere

Anna Prescott
Carmel High School

But I Love You

Rusted knives spewed out from my throat
My words were muffled by your demands
You ask me to speak my mind
Knowing I would nod in agreement
To your commands

Sarai Bucio-Valdovinos
Rancho San Juan High School

Mi mesa de la cocina

I'm almost never there.
I always see her alone.
I've never seen
my whole family together.
It's not the same as in my country
where being at the table
is being with the whole happy family.

Kitchen Table

At the kitchen table,
I'm usually gone.
I don't eat with my family.
I prefer to eat alone.
I'd rather watch something while I eat.
I find conversations with my family awkward.
There's nothing to talk about.
They have different interests than me.
I end up looking at my plate
until it's finished.

Kitchen Table

At my kitchen table
that I don't use to eat at
flowers bloom and die
nails are painted
conversations are noisy
homework is unfinished
bags are left
dogs bark
waiting for food to drop
but we eat on the couch
watching the same show
over and over again
laughing

Chantel Molina
Rancho San Juan High School

Nostalgic

Family dinners
in a kitchen
so small and so cozy
we had to wait our turn
to grab our plates.
“Nostalgic”
is what comes to mind
whenever I pass
my parents' kitchen.
What once was a kitchen
filled with joy and laughter
is now only a memory
trapped in my mind.

Gabriel Cerna-Garibay
Rancho San Juan High School

tides

God is my favorite teacher
he works with the universe
with the earth

the sun his pen
the moon his paper
the tides his voice
i have spent years
learning his lessons

he taught me to swim
the first time he covered me
with great waves
closed my throat with water
forced shut my eyes with a salt bath
held my hand as i emerged
from the unrelenting ocean

the first time my mind was quiet
the first time i was soothed

when the dry land causes my skin to crack and bleed
all that is easy is to return to the sea

an eternal classroom
with kelp classmates
when the sun has set
and the stars reflect off the surface

hours basking in knowledge
prunes my fingers
and dries my hair so it crunches and breaks

there is no need to talk
when you can float

Keira Cranston
Carmel High School

Whispers of Wisdom: An Owl's Tale

In the sedateness of the night, beneath the moon's glow
I, the owl, perched high, with wisdom to bestow.
Through the ages, I've watched your world unfold
In the tapestry of time, stories untold.

Oh, humans, heed my words, spoken in the night.
For in the shadows, truths take flight.
I've seen your quest for knowledge, your thirst for more.
Yes oftentimes, wisdom lies at nature's door.

You build your towers high, reaching for the sky
But forget the earth beneath, where secrets lie.
In the rustle of the leaves, in the whispers of the wind,
Lie the wisdom of the ages, waiting to be pinned.

Listen, oh humans, to the song of the earth.
In its rhythm, find your true worth.
For in the dance of life, we are all but one
Linked by nature's thread under the sun.

Embrace the silence, the stillness of the night.
For in its depths, lies wisdom's light.
Oh, humans, learn from me, the wise old owl,
And find in nature's embrace your eternal owl.

Jermaine Torres
Silver Star, a program of Rancho Cielo

Ice-Cold

Sun shining down from above,
Heavy breaths after the long hike,
A light breeze flowing through my hair,
Almost as fluid as the water below.

I dip my feet into the ice-cold water.
Shasta Red Pine and White Fir galore.
I survey the rock towering above the lake
25 feet tall, maybe more

Should I jump?
Could I jump?
Only one way to find out.
My mind wills my body to try.

I gaze over the edge,
Water far below now,
I let in a breath of oxygen to my lungs,
And send my body over the imposing edge.

My stomach drops, as I plummet down,
Gravity exerting its pull on my body.
I see the field of blue approaching,
And just like that, I'm 15 feet deep

I swim to the shore, cold to my core.
The adrenaline still pumping through me.
I will never do that again, I tell myself.
But wait, maybe one more time.

Sebastian Blessing
Carmel High School

Rose Petals

Rose petals flutter
falling to the soft dry earth
drifting slow in the wind

Victoria Garza-Gomez
Rancho San Juan High School

Snap

A thin strand of twine
Serves as the line,
Between pitch black darkness
And all-consuming light.
It is taut, giving no sign of breaking,
Although constantly shaking.
Slowly, it unwinds until undone.
The twine no longer one
Breaking loose its strands fall far below
Out of the light, into the shadow.

Exacting

Lost in the periods and commas
Lost in the towers of books on my desk
Lost in the collections of lines and curves on my paper
Artificial flower blooms from cheap perfumes
The sound of graphite dragged across paper
I proved to myself I could do it
Winning against other teams
The feeling of pins and needles and the respite thereafter
Time keeps on rolling through, even when I'm not looking
6 boxes on a checklist checked off
The billowing of clouds pass by me
A panoply of pigmentations and profiles pirouette above my head
But when I blink, I am met with a clear sky

Exacting

Not stressful, as it is too negative a word
Not stringent, as it is too rigid
Not busy, as it does not bring the point across
The cursor flickers on and off the screen
Waiting for the right word to welcome itself into my mind
Constantly waiting
Waiting for the right moment
The right words
The right collection of letters to convey my month
The amalgamation of events all collected into one word
The task felt arduous
I felt tired, rolling a large stone up a steep hill
As if I kept rolling and rolling and rolling it up
The stone kept rolling down

The scratching of charcoal on paper
Lines organized into recognizable shapes
Letters litter the lined paper
Jotting down ideas and thoughts
Trying to make the next month not as
Exacting

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